

THE Wanton WIFE of BATH.



IN Bath a wanton wife did dwell,
 (As Chaucer he doth write)
 Who did in pleasure spend her days,
 And many a fond delight.
 Upon a time sore sick she was,
 And at the length did die;
 Her soul arriv'd at Heaven's gate,
 And knock'd most mightily.
 Then Adam came unto the gate:
 Who knocketh there, quoth he?
 I am the wife of Bath, she said,
 And fain would come to thee.
 Thou art a sinner, Adam said,
 And here no place shalt have.
 Alas! for you, good sir, she said,
 Now gip, you doating knave.
 I will come in, in spite, she said,
 Of all such churls as thee.
 Thou wert the cause of all our woe,
 Our pain and misery.

And first broke God's commandments,
 In pleasure of thy wife.
 When Adam heard her tell that tale,
 He ran away for life.
 Then down came Jacob to the gate,
 Who bad her pack to Hell.
 You false deceiver, why, said she?
 You might be there as well!
 For you deceiv'd your father dear,
 And your own brother too.
 So away went Jacob presently,
 And made no more ado.
 She knock'd again with might and main,
 And Lot did chide her frant:
 How now, quoth she, thou doating ass,
 Who bid thee here to wait?
 With thy two daughters thou didst lie,
 On them two bastards got.
 And thus most tauntingly she chafed
 Against poor silly Lot.

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Who knocketh there, quoth Judith then,
 With such shrill-sounding notes?
 This noise, fine minx, you cannot bear,
 Quoth she, for cutting throats.
 Good Lord! how Judith blush'd for shame,
 When she heard her say so.
 King David hearing of the same,
 Unto the gate did go.
 Quoth David, Who knocks there so loud,
 And causeth all this strife?
 You were more kind, good sir, she said,
 Unto Uriah's wife.
 When thou didst cause thy servant
 In battle to be slain;
 You caused then more strife than I
 Who would come here so fain.
 The woman's mad, quoth Solomon,
 Thus for to taunt a king!
 Not half so mad as you, said she,
 I know in many a thing.
 You had seven hundred wives, she said,
 For whom thou didst provide;
 Yet for all this three hundred whores
 Thou didst maintain beside.
 And these made thee forsake thy God,
 And worship stocks and stones,
 Besides the charge they put thee to,
 In breeding of young bones.
 Hadst thou not been beside thy wits,
 Thou wouldst not thus have ventur'd;
 And therefore I do marvel much
 How thou this place hast enter'd.
 I never heard, quoth Jonas then,
 So vile a scold as this.
 You whorson runaway, quoth she,
 Thou didst more amiss.
 I think, quoth Thomas, womens' tongues
 Of aspen-leaves are made.
 You disbelieving wretch, she said,
 All is not true that's said.
 When Mary Magdalen heard her chafe,
 She came unto the gate:
 Quoth she, Good woman, you must think
 Upon your former state.
 No sinners enter in this place,
 Quoth Mary Magdalen.
 'Twere ill for you, fair mistress mild,
 She answer'd her again.
 You, for your honesty, said she,
 Should once been ston'd to death,

Had not our Saviour Christ come by,
 And wrote upon the earth.
 It is not thro' your occupation
 You are become divine:
 I hope my soul in Christ's passion
 Will be as safe as thine.
 Then rose the good apostle Paul,
 Unto the wife he cry'd,
 Except thou shake thy sins away,
 Thou here must be deny'd.
 Remember, Paul, what thou hast done,
 All thro' a lewd desire;
 How thou didst persecute God's church
 With wrath as hot as fire.
 Then up starts Peter at the last,
 And to the gate he hies:
 Fond fool, said he, knock not so fast,
 Thou weary'st Christ with cries.
 Peter, she cries, content thyself,
 For mercy may be won;
 I never did deny my Lord,
 As thou thyself hast done.
 When as our Saviour Christ heard this,
 With heavenly angels bright,
 He came unto this sinful soul,
 Who trembled at his sight.
 Of him for mercy she did crave.
 Quoth he, Thou hast refus'd
 My proffer'd grace and mercy both,
 And much my name abus'd.
 Sore have I sinn'd, O Lord, she said,
 And spent my time in vain;
 But bring me like a wandering sheep,
 Into thy flock again.
 O Lord, my God, I will amend
 My former wicked vice.—
 The thief at these poor silly words
 Past into Paradise.
 My laws and my commandments,
 Said Christ, were known to thee,
 But of the same in any wise
 Not yet a whit did ye.
 I grant the same, O Lord, she said,
 Most lewdly did I live;
 But yet the loving father did
 His prodigal son forgive.
 So I forgive thy soul, he said,
 Thro' thy repenting cry;
 Come thou therefore into my rest,
 I will not thee deny.